

Testimony of Robert Klee
Committee on Executive and Legislative Nominations
February 25, 2014

Chairman Looney and Chairwoman Janowski, Ranking Members Fasano and Camillo and members of the Committee on Executive and Legislative Nominations....I thank you for inviting me here today.

Just about three years ago, I started work as the Chief of Staff for what was then called the Department of Environmental Protection.

As Chief of Staff I was involved in the inner workings of the Agency – from Human Resources, budgeting, and technology, to setting policy and direction for environmental regulation and the operation of our state parks and forests. I was also directly involved in the integration of the energy and environmental sides of our agency and the build out of a new cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable energy agenda when Governor Malloy and this General Assembly took action to create the new Department of Energy and Environmental Protection or “DEEP”.

As Chief of Staff, I developed a real understanding of the Agency, and an appreciation for the importance of our work. I also had the chance to work with an amazing staff – a collection of smart, motivated, and passionate people who care about the mission of DEEP. In fact, when talking about my work I often told family, friends, and colleagues that being Chief of Staff at DEEP was the best job I've ever had.

Well, with your support, I may need to revise that statement.

I am honored and humbled that Governor Malloy has nominated me to serve as Commissioner. I know that many of you have built strong relationships with DEEP's former Commissioner, Dan Esty – who was (and still is) a mentor, colleague and friend. I look forward to continuing and building upon those strong relationships.

The opportunity to serve as DEEP Commissioner is a dream come true for this Connecticut native who grew up with a real appreciation for the world of nature.

I have had a passion for the environment since I was a small child – about the age of my own two boys – going on camping vacations with my parents.

I carried that passion through my education and as part of that had an opportunity to see some of the most amazing natural places throughout the world – including the volcanoes of Hawaii and the glaciers of Antarctica.

But, as a Connecticut native, I have always had a special place in my heart for our forests, our parks, our beaches and marshes along Long Island Sound.

My PhD research focused on the field of "industrial ecology" which explores how our human industrial systems can better interact with natural systems. I chose an unusual place to study these interactions – Antarctica – where I analyzed how materials, energy, and waste are handled by the various international research stations on that continent.

In fact, one news report picked up on the rather academic title of my thesis, "Materials Flow Analysis of the industrial Systems in Antarctica." As a result, some have dubbed me Dr. Trash.

It's a nickname I like, however, especially because transforming Connecticut's waste management system in order to capture more of the economic value of materials in our waste stream is a major challenge facing our state, but also a great opportunity for improvement, innovation, and leadership.

As you can see from the resume in front of you, I have degrees that touch upon science, environmental policy, and law... but I also have real world experience and a practical perspective through my career as a geologist, lawyer, and my work as Chief of Staff of DEEP. I believe these experiences will serve me well as Commissioner.

I also bring to the job a commitment to public service and a desire to work closely with this General Assembly in a bipartisan manner.

Working together, we can build on the successes we have enjoyed by putting our state's environmental, conservation and energy agendas under one roof – an approach that has made Connecticut a national model. We have demonstrated that we can integrate environmental and energy policy and that we can base our environmental and energy regulatory decisions on a solid scientific and policy foundation.

Working together, we can continue to preserve and protect our natural resources through environmental stewardship, open space acquisition, investments in our park infrastructure, encouraging smart growth and transit oriented development, and improving the resiliency of our Long Island Sound shoreline and our inland floodplain communities.

Working together, we can continue to move the state toward a cheaper, cleaner, and more reliable energy future, by deploying energy efficiency and renewable energy at scale, and by taking state, regional, and federal actions that result in lower costs for energy for Connecticut's homes and businesses.

And working together, we can continue to transform the way government does business through LEAN and investments in eGovernment and Information Technology, which will lighten regulatory burdens while still maintaining our high standards for environmental protection.

With the backing of the General Assembly, we have been given the policy tools needed to achieve these goals. We have three strong branches in our agency – Environmental Conservation, Environmental Quality, and Energy. I know staff in all three branches are eager to keep moving forward and I am ready to provide the leadership needed to ensure our continued progress.

I look forward to a rigorous, implementation-oriented agenda. If I could define what I believe to be a successful tenure for my Commissionership, I would simply like to be known as the Commissioner who “got stuff done”.

As noted earlier, I am a Connecticut native, raised in Fairfield I now live in New Haven, and I am also now blessed to be the father of two wonderful boys, Alex, 6, and Jacob, 4. My wife Anne and I are committed to instilling in them an appreciation for nature and a love of the outdoors.

To that end, we have made it a point to visit many of our state’s great parks and natural spaces – both as a part of DEEP’s nationally recognized No Child Left Inside® program and our own family excursions. We have already been ice fishing, camping, hiking, canoeing, and swimming at beaches in dozens and dozens of state parks and recreation areas....and we plan to visit many more parks and forests over the coming years.

Being out there with my family makes very real to me the fundamental purpose of the work of DEEP and the job of Commissioner.

That purpose is to ensure that the air, water, and lands of this state are protected – not just for now but for today’s young people and generations to come.

That purpose is to ensure that we preserve our natural resources, our wildlife, our scenic beauty, and the qualities that make Connecticut special – even as we seek economic growth and job creation that will spread the benefits of prosperity to more of our citizens.

With the confidence the Governor has placed in me, and the endorsement I hope to obtain from this Committee and the General Assembly, I look forward to working with all of you and the people of Connecticut to develop and implement policies that will achieve our energy and environmental goals and build a legacy for our state that we can proudly pass on to the next generation.

I thank everyone on this Committee for the courtesy you have extended to me today and I welcome any questions you may have.

Thank you.